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## THE SUICIDAL CIVILIZATION: TECHNOPESSIMISM AND THE COMING COLLAPSE

NECROPOLITICS ACCELERATION, BARBARISM, BIFO BERARDI, DEATH, NICK LAND, TECHNOLOGY

*...suicide is the decisive political act of our times.*

— Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*

*It is not worth the bother of killing yourself, since you always kill yourself too late.*

— Emile Cioran, *The Trouble with being Born*

Base materialism begins in the tomb, a world of death that presents itself as life. This is neither Plato's Cave, nor the scientific infinity of stars and the abyss. This is rather an ocean of energy, a realm of annihilating light and inexistence. Following Nick Land we promote a diagnostic truth against the "speculative, phenomenal, and meditative" philosophers of a false intuitionism, following instead the underbelly of those criminal outcasts of thought: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bataille among others toward a materialism that seeks not the phenomenal surface of things, but rather the 'noumenon' – the impersonal death and unconscious drive of an "energetic unconscious". This is an experiential turn toward an heretical empiricism not of knowledge, but of collapse.

Life itself is the first criminal act, a crime against an otherwise uniform and mindless universe of death. The second criminal act is the notion that humans are an exception to the rule of death, that somehow they do not belong to the order of things but are rather its masters and benefactors. The crime of humanity is the crime against existence itself; a crime from which there is no appeal, only annihilation. With religion came the final crime of the human regime: the belief that humans have a mandate from higher powers, a mandate to command, control and seize the universe in the name of a god, as well as a mandate to control each other and the surfeit of life upon the face of the earth. The Secular regime is itself a religious project: a religion of disinheritance, a religion without gods – an a-theism; a crime of omission, rather than commission.

"The fact that life has no meaning is a reason to live –moreover, the only one," says Cioran. Nihilism is the first step in an active annihilation not of reality, but of the human illusions of reality; and of humanity itself as a primal illusion, one that must be rendered null and void. Karl Marx himself would say "religion in itself is without content, it owes its being not to heaven but to the earth, and with the abolition of distorted reality, of which it is the theory, it will collapse of itself." (Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge

In Dresden (1842)) With the death and murder of the gods, and God, we began that slow and methodical destruction of the illusions that have bound us in a cage of madness for millennia. Yet, this step into freedom was captured and turned against us, an act at once of enslavement and total evisceration, a systematic unveiling of an order of obstinate sociopathy, a recursion to a formalism of a voidic disaggregation enclosing us in a a non-time, a present without outlet; a static conveyance that has no other goal than its own continuance: an aberration of the death-flows it seeks to evade, a cage for the desires that it seeks to bind from the inherent movement of death. Civilization is this system: capitalism is its engine, an alien form of life that has no inherent objective other than annihilation.

"We are all deep in a hell each moment of which is a miracle." – Emile Cioran

Ours is a culture of the excrescence of death, a thanatopic pursuit not of profit but of total annihilation. The principle of deregulation inherent in global capitalism is inextinguishable from the total acceleration of a deterritorialized, systematic and efficient cannibalism, one that seeks to incorporate every last niche of biopower within a machinic phylum – a civilization of machinic and technocratic infestation from which there is no reprieve. The question is whether one accepts the truth of this and joins the comedy of destruction and implosion (helps it along, gives it a push), or whether one spends one's time in the factories of oblivion, illusory worlds of decaying narratives of disorder and madness spinning out of control, reversions to outworn heresies of a bankrupt and decadent ethno-apocalypse by way of irony and fake solutions.

In a realm in which "reality no longer has the time to take on the appearance of reality" (Baudrillard), the fractalized mentations of delirium become our only guide through the deserts of our erotic inheritance. Like lover's lost in a maze we listen to the ghost voices from the other ends of time, seeking in the closed chambers of this hollow world a valence it can no longer support. Victims of our own mythologies of the human we project our fears onto the machinic phylum we are becoming. Gamblers of a posthuman future we seek to preserve an identity we never held, a broken thought of a broken idealism: transhumanism is itself the problem it purports to escape. Nothing human will escape this systematic dispersion, a bifurcation at once integral and completely annihilating for that fatal being called humanity – a terminal vector beyond which there is nothing human, only the pure impersonalism of a mindless degeneracy discovering for the first and last time a path into inexistence.

*Modernity invented the future, but that's all over. In the current version 'progressive history' camouflages phylogenetic death-drive tactics, Kali-wave: logistically accelerating condensation of virtual species extinction. Welcome to the matricide laboratory. You want it so badly it's a slow scream in your head, deleting itself into bliss.*  
– Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena*

The postmoderns stared into the vast pit and were afraid of its wild and unruly behaviors: the machinic systems of capture that were slowly devouring the earth in their parasitical takeover and transformation of the human animal required an alternative ploy, a form of experimental capture: a mediascape of visual representationalism that would hypnotize even the skeptical among them, bringing not only their desires within the registry of an indexical black box, but also their infinite capacity to dream unwarranted dreams, illusory utopias of an unfathomable apocalyptic future filled with technocratic robotic life-forms unsuspecting that they were themselves the very thing they feared most: machines of another order, an alien fruit of inhuman desire.

Ours is a time between times, an interregnum out of which the new is being born. One form of civilization is in its final death pangs, while another is being born. Shall we help give birth to this new beast? Or, slink back into our caves of isolated madness seeking solace in our earthly dreams? There can be no middle road. One can only become other: becoming-animal, or becoming-machine: the choice is not yours to make, the decision is already beyond your grasp.

*There's a madman inside me and he's hacking away, hacking and hacking until he strikes the final discord. Pure annihilation, as distinguished from lesser, muddier annihilations. Nothing to be mopped up afterwards. A wheel of light rolling up to the precipice – and over into the bottomless pit.*  
– Henry Miller, *Black Spring*

Progressive civilization is not progressive at all, rather it seeks to hinder the future from giving birth to this strange new realm of being. Global capitalism is a religion and defense against the future, not its progenitor. The leaders of the world seek to encapsulate us in a time of no time, an absolute zero point of nullity, a presentism in which acceleration can be bound to the wheel of death, rather than the spiral of escape beyond the limits of the known. As Nick Land tells us: "Bataille interprets all natural and cultural development upon the earth to be side-effects of the evolution of death, because it is only in death that life becomes an echo of the sun, realizing its inevitable destiny, which is pure loss."<sup>1</sup>

The thin line that separates Kant's famous distinction between phenomena and the noumenon is an artificial and speculative lie, a fiction that seeks to save the human from the terror of its own demise. Consciousness is this salvatory mythology created by this distinction between subject and object, a distinction that in Bataille and Land becomes a final barrier to communication, to the fusion of materiality intensified by its continuous flow within the impersonal. Kant put a stop to this flow, froze it in the transcendental illusion: sponsoring an immobile time, static and abstract, a realm caught between the limits of a false alliance to consciousness and a distancing from its roots in the energetic unconscious. Imprisoned in a cage of epistemological logicism Kant gave birth to the capitalist regime of pure death: a realm of abstract and transcendental illusions that have bound us to a thanatropic culture for two-hundred years.

*Speculative Posthumanism claims that a nonhuman successor to humans could arise in consequence of our technological activity. But it is not committed to the claim that such beings will realize our humanist dreams or apocalyptic nightmares.*  
– David Roden, *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human*

“Capital breaks down and reconstructs us, with increasing frequency, as it pursues its energetic fluctuations towards annihilation, driven to the liberation of the sun, whilst the object hurtles into the vaporization of proto-schizophrenic commodification.” Land’s immersion in the dark mythologies of Capital awaken us to the non-representational processes that lurk in the core engines of drive, a productive and energetic unconscious that is continuously working out its own strange project even as it shapes and uses us in its communicative system of solar economics. Like outriders of an electronic storm we hover at the center of a full-blown hurricane, calmly drifting at the center of a terrible wind, awaiting the moment when we too can enter the destructive stream of annihilation and begin the process of pure loss.

Knowing that its community with nature sucks it into psychosis and death mankind valorizes its autonomy, whilst cursing the tidal desires that tug it down towards fusional dissolution. Morality is thus the distilled imperative to autonomous integrity, which brands as evil the impulse to skinless contact and the merging of bodies. (Land, p. 124)

The first boundary stones were systems of enclosure, defenses against that which existed outside the known, the true and good world of the ancestors. As Camille Paglia will reiterate in her fantasia of sex and death: “Society is an artificial construction, a defense against nature’s power. Without society, we would be storm-tossed on the barbarous sea that is nature. Society is a system of inherited forms reducing our humiliating passivity to nature. We may alter these forms, slowly or suddenly, but no change in society will change nature. Human beings are not nature’s favorites. We are merely one of a multitude of species upon which nature indiscriminately exerts its force. Nature has a master agenda we can only dimly know.”<sup>2</sup>

*“The mind is alive with a new range of possibilities: to centralize them, to collect them under a lens that is neither material nor delimited— what is popularly called: the soul. The ways of expressing them, of transmuting them: the means. Bright as a flash of gold— the increasing beauty of expanding wings ... Under the bark of felled trees, I seek the image to come, of vigor, and in underground tunnels the obscurity of iron and coal may already be heavy with light.”*  
– Tristan Tzara, *Hopeful Human, Still Hung Up on the Industrial Age, 1919*

When the beast is set loose upon us we suddenly take notice, yet we are never able to comprehend its actual workings in our lives. When Berardi studies the mass murders and suicidal epidemic overtaking civilization he like so many staid philosophers of our time cannot comprehend the dark river of intensity lurking below the threshold of our civilizational defense system. Instead he seeks to freeze-frame it in a logic of a cliché, to enthrone this turn toward mass murder and suicide as the logic of capitalism, the “establishment of a kingdom of nihilism and the suicidal drive that is permeating contemporary culture, together with a phenomenology of panic, aggression and resultant violence”.<sup>3</sup> Of course this is partly true, yet it is still permeated by the problematic limits of an epistemological reduction to a phenomenology of the representations and images of culture in a knowing that is neither knowing nor fully enabled to open up the actual wildness of this deep force surging up from the hinterlands of our collective and tribal unconscious, our madness.

What Berardi seeks is not liberation but rather to preserve the very prison that keeps us from the terminal chaos of annihilation: “Everybody knows that life is merciless, and that time is marked by the entropic law of dispersion, loss, malady and death. This is why human beings have created that thing that goes under the name of society, along with all those institutions that are supposed to protect us from the harshness of life. This is why human beings have developed scientific knowledge and technology. Only when people can expect a reasonable degree of protection against misery and against the violence of the economy can they enjoy their life.” (Berardi, KL 54) Yet, even Berardi sees this is all over, the realm of protection and defense, civilization itself, the game of the Western illusion of democracy is at an end. So what comes next? For Berardi the next game in town “will be about neuro-plasticity”:

Mapping the activity of the brain is going to be the main task of science in the next decades, while wiring the activity of the collective brain will be the main task of technology. The new alternative will emerge at this level, between the ultimate automation of the collective brain and the conscious self-organization of the general intellect. Cognitive workers – particularly scientists, artists and engineers – will be the prime actors in this new game. In the meantime, we have to draw the lines of a new ethics in order to be able to retain our humanity in the course of the trans-human transition. (Berardi, KL 2570)

Ah, there is the progressive catch of the true Leftist, we must “draw the lines of a new ethics in order to be able to retain our humanity in the course of the trans-human transition”. So that Berardi like a good son of Kant would like to keep one foot in prison just in case this transitional moment into the posthuman future ends in failure; a hedging of one’s bets, a capitalist move of risk assessment and profit for the human(ist) vision of the transcendental illusion. Yet, as Land admits this is an old trick of the Left, a rearguard action to conserve while acting the part of the radical: “Humanity is a petrified fiction hiding from zero, a purgatorial imprisonment of dissolution, but to be stricken with sanctity is to bask in death like a reptile in the sun” (Land, p. 131).

Being is the last illusion of a dead metaphysics. Philosophy is this dark betrayal that has constructed the very lie of civilization from its beginnings till now. "Being derives only a vanishing speck of an eliminative negativity. The overwhelmingly preponderant part of its deviance stems from its irresolvable composition, beyond which there is only idealist phantasms" (Land, p. 158). Under the sign of elimination being begins to dissolve its hold on us and slips away into its own illusory system of fictions. Breaking with the logic of salvation, of the humanist paradigm, we follow the convulsions of hazard, break free from the Kantian nihil negativum (Land) and begin to float among the tributary whirls of the coming data storm, freed to pursue a antilogical cosmism in which the irresolvable improbability, irrational negation, and interminable compositional intricacy of interwoven spaces of aberration corrupt the earth and everything on it – a labyrinth of desiring machines roaming the bad lands of futurity implode upon us like metalloid locust from an alien slipstream.

*What if we were to think media theory as itself an artistic practice, that is, as a form of aesthetic imagination that seeks to directly enter the world of data nerves, network skin, and increasingly algorithmic minds with the intention of capturing the dominant mood of these posthuman times – drift culture – in a form of thought that dwells in complicated intersections and complex borderlands? In its essence, thinking with and against the larger technopoesis of accelerate, drift, and crash that holds us in its sway requires a form of media reflection that is itself an exit to the posthuman future.*  
– Arthur Kroker, *Exits to the Posthuman Future*

Death is not the opposite of life, it is the forbidden truth of life itself. Death itself is a domestication of the energetic unconscious and drives that burst through such frozen concepts. Language is the domestication of the human into illusory sign-worlds – semiotic regimes of abstraction – devoid of life, a realm in which death-in-life has no other recourse than following the prescribed script of a coded and organized algorithm. We've domesticated death through our very incorporation of it into literature, as a sign we can feel safe with it, allow it to be a representation – an art form that comforts us, and allows us to be at home with death. This mirror of death is hollow:

What greater mistake than confusing our death with non-being? Is it because we want to believe in the loyalty of our substance that we make this peculiar equation? If so, we should be ashamed of our dishonesty. The facts are blatant: it is not the case that death leaves matter satisfied. At most it is a temporary refreshment, a cool black wave for matter to bask in like a reptile, a phase of dormancy, before the rush back into the convulsive dissipation of life. ... It is almost as if we still believe in the faithful resurrection of the flesh. How humiliating then that matter remains itchy after shaking us from it, that it is still eager, that even before our mourners have forgotten us it is flirting with the worms... Across the aeons our mass of hydro-carbon enjoys a veritable harem of souls. (Land, p. 180)

Being neither existential nor natural, death for Bataille could not be reduced to either a metaphysics of miserabilism nor to naturalism's scientificity. Beyond the illusory worlds of signs and texts lies the black voids of an interminable oblivion, a fever dream of impossible joys, a realm in which we are delivered by our unholy intimacy and ties with death:

The fever that bears me overstretches the entire health of Earth, carrying me with my accursed twin into an emptiness beyond the reservoir of stars. Although the adventure of inexistence only begins in Hell there is no fear, only awe and burning werewolf thirst for the voyage. Nestled in some cove of this ulterior shore an utterly consummate eroticism – a pact against nature – tenses through fusion to its evaporation, denuded before the abyss; a glistening droplet of loss and beginning. (Land, p. 206)

Beyond the sobs of the troubadours of the Sublime lies the ocean of darkness, a realm where we who meld into the folds of oblivion chart the destiny of stars like members of an endless assemblage, a swarming cellular mass of inexistence that vanishes in the deepest abyss of zero. The data storm is flowing out of the future and into our lives, we have only to surrender to its accelerating annihilation, float among the debris of dead and dying civilizations like insects in a inexistent holodeck, members of a strange and terrible world that seeks to absorb us into its interminable labyrinth. Shall we follow?

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1. Nick Land *A Thirst for Annihilation* (Routledge, 1992)
  2. Paglia, Camille (1990-09-10). *Sexual Personae* (p. 1). Yale University Press. Kindle Edition.
  3. Berardi, Franco "Bifo" (2015-02-03). *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide (Futures)* (Kindle Locations 54-55). Verso Books. Kindle Edition.

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